



Chambers's Journal

SIXTH SERIES.

THE BICHO GAME.

THROUGHOUT nearly all the states of Brazil the Bicho Game is at present rampant. The game is a comparatively new form of gambling; and it is no exaggeration to say that you can hardly move a yard without hearing of it. To add to its fascination is the fact that, being a sort of opposition to the regular lotteries, the game is unlawful, and agents selling tickets are constantly arrested. The system depends on the daily State-protected lottery in Rio de Janeiro, and is very simple, enabling the labourers who cannot read or write to gamble with those who can. The idea is as follows: The numbers from 1 to 100 are divided into twenty-five groups of four two-figure groups. Each of the twenty-five groups has a name; the English equivalent is inserted by the writer:

1. Avestruz	Ostrich	01	02	03	04
2. Agua	Eagle	05	06	07	08
3. Burro	Donkey	09	10	11	12
4. Borboleta	Butterfly	13	14	15	16
5. Cachorro	Dog	17	18	19	20
6. Cabra	Nannygoat	21	22	23	24
7. Carneiro	Sheep	25	26	27	28
8. Camello	Camel	29	30	31	32
9. Cobra	Snake	33	34	35	36
10. Coelho	Rabbit	37	38	39	40
11. Cavallo	Horse	41	42	43	44
12. Elephante	Elephant	45	46	47	48
13. Gallo	Cock	49	50	51	52
14. Gato	Cat	53	54	55	56
15. Jacaré	Crocodile	57	58	59	60
16. Leão	Lion	61	62	63	64
17. Macaco	Monkey	65	66	67	68
18. Porco	Pig	69	70	71	72
19. Pavão	Peacock	73	74	75	76
20. Peru	Turkey	77	78	79	80
21. Touro	Bull	81	82	83	84
22. Tigre	Tiger	85	86	87	88
23. Urso	Bear	89	90	91	92
24. Viado	Deer	93	94	95	96
25. Vacca	Cow	97	98	99	00

The last two figures of the first prize in the Rio daily lottery decides what Bicho has won.

No. 77.—Vol. II.

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Say the first prize at Rio falls to No. 64,083; then the Bicho is 'Touro,' or group No. 21. The bankers give you twenty to one against any group. The odds at first glance appear to be in favour of the bank; and as a matter of fact the bankers make a lot of money. There is one drawback to the unlimited success on the bankers' side: there is no limit to the stakes; so, if a person begins betting with a very small sum, he can continue betting until the particular group he chooses turns up. Of course he must continue to bet on the same group every day, and after nineteen days must increase his stake. If the group comes up within nineteen days he loses nothing or gains according to the time he has been betting.

Some of the Bichos do not come out for months—the 'Peacock' did not come up once for nearly five months; and a small calculation will prove that a long purse is necessary very often. The 'Jacaré,' on the other hand, comes up frequently, and often appears two days running. The popularity of this kind of gambling is almost incredible. From the highest to the lowest, a large majority buy tickets every day.

The people of Brazil are superstitious; and well-educated people will back 'coincidences.' I have known cases of people who have given the correct group day after day; two cases I know personally. Strange to say, in both these cases the prophets were given money 'for luck' by people who backed their tips, and invariably lost it. A good dreamer will often dream the right group; but I fear the wrong groups dreamt of are not talked about. There are many strange stories of winnings and losses. Not very long ago a sorrowful family had assembled to bid farewell to a dying old man. It is stated seriously that he told every one present to buy 'Jacaré' at once. He died almost immediately after, and it is a fact that Group 15 came up that day. A young fellow came to town very excited one morning. He had dreamt that he saw a donkey walking along the roof of his house. The 'Cat' came up

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that day, and he lost heavily over the 'Donkey,' but he told every one he met that he was the donkey not to have known that the 'Cat' was almost the only Bicho on the list that could walk along a roof.

The whole affair is, of course, very demoralising; but the government has been unable to cope with the evil. Agents meet you at street corners, and all the small general stores sell tickets. The bankers give a commission of from ten to fifteen per cent to their agents; and the money is so easily earned that it is almost hopeless to try to put an end to the game. In some cases it is said that bribery will ensure the safety of a banker; and undoubtedly a lot of bribery goes on in connection with the game. If a banker oversteps his limit and cannot pay up he merely runs away, and the backers are left with no remedy. This is by no means a rare occurrence. Theft and dishonesty are on the increase amongst the lower classes, and are said to be due entirely to the gambling fever.

To towns at a distance from Rio the result is telegraphed as soon as known; and about the time the telegram is expected a crowd of agents collect in the streets outside the cable offices. In one town I have seen the approaches to the telegraph office cleared by police, who had to be summoned to get rid of the obstruction. Every one hastens to learn the result, and in a very short time the news spreads by word of mouth and telephone all over the town. At nearly

every railway station on the different railways, agents arrive to receive telegrams containing the result or to try to find out what it is. The evening trains from town are besieged by country people, especially small boys, to hear the correct result.

The Bicho Game seems to have taken hold of the people as the 'rain-gambling' did in India, and I doubt if it will ever be stamped out. In Brazil there is one lottery every day, excepting Sundays and holidays. Often there are two lotteries on the same day; and in most towns the races take place on Sundays and holidays. Gambling goes on in every form; and the entrance-tickets to the racecourses are often numbered, and a lottery drawn during the afternoon for the people who have purchased them. With such a state of things going on every day, and all day long, the government will have a big task if they try seriously to stop the Bicho Game. Almost daily you may hear excited quarrelling over the group that is 'certain to come up,' and the reasons are invariably given why the 'Cat' or the 'Elephant' must come up that day. These reasons, although, of course, childish and absurd, are debated solemnly by people who should know better. An Englishman one day backed the 'Vaca' because he had awakened in the morning to find he had kicked off all his bedclothes, and so thought 00 would win. The group that came up was 'Urso,' and he still declares that he got the tip to back the 'Bear,' but did not read it rightly.

THE RED RAT'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER XXV.

THREE weeks had elapsed since that memorable afternoon when the party on board the yacht had obtained their first glimpse of the island of Saghalien. In pursuance of the plan MacAndrew had revealed to him in Hong-kong, Browne had left his companions upon the vessel, and for upwards of forty-eight hours had domiciled himself in a small log-hut on the northern side of the Bay of Kropotskoi, awaiting news of the man whom they had come so far and undertaken so much to rescue. It was the night of full moon, and the scene which Browne had before him as he stood wrapped up in his furs outside the door of the hut was as miserable as a man could well desire to become acquainted with. The settlement, as I have said, was located at the northern end of a small bay, and had once consisted of upwards of six huts, built upon a slight eminence, having at its foot a river still ice-bound. At the back rose a still more precipitous hill, densely clothed with *taiga*, or forest. So impenetrable, indeed,

was it that even the wolf and bear found a difficulty in making their way through it. To the right, and almost unobservable from the huts, was a track that once connected with the coal-mines of Dui, but was now overgrown and scarcely to be distinguished from the virgin forest on either side.

On this particular evening Browne was the reverse of easy in his mind. He had left the yacht buoyed up by the knowledge that in so doing he was best serving the woman he loved. It had been arranged with MacAndrew that they should meet at this hut not later than the thirteenth day of that particular month. This, however, was the evening of the fifteenth, and still neither MacAndrew nor the man they were endeavouring to rescue had put in an appearance. Apart from every consideration of danger, it was far from being the sort of place a man would choose in which to spend his leisure. The hut was draughty and bitterly cold; the scenery was entirely uninviting; he had no one to speak to; he had to do everything—even his

cooking—for himself; while, away out in the bay, the ice chinked and rattled together continually, as if to remind him of his miserable position. It was nearly nine o'clock, and he could very well guess what they were doing on board the yacht. His guests would be in the drawing-room. Katherine would be playing at the piano one of those soft German folk-songs of which she was so fond, and most probably thinking of himself; Madame Bernstein would be knitting in an easy-chair beside the stove; while the gentlemen would be listening to the music and wondering how long it would be before they would be at liberty to retire to the smoking-room and their cigars. He could picture the soft electric light falling on a certain plain gold ring on Katherine's finger, and upon the stones of a bracelet upon her slender wrist. Taken altogether, he did not remember to have felt so home-sick ever in his life before. As if to add to his sensation of melancholy, while he was pursuing this miserable train of thought a wolf commenced to howl dismally in the forest behind him. This was the climax. Unable to bear any more, he retired into the hut, bolted the door, and, wrapping himself up in his blanket, laid himself down upon his bed and was soon asleep. When he looked out upon the world next morning he found himself confronted with a dense fog, which obscured everything—the forest behind him, the ice-girdled shore in front, and indeed all his world. It is, of course, possible that in this world of ours there may be places with more unpleasant climates than Saghalien, but it would be difficult to find them. On the west coast the foggy and rainy days average two hundred and fifty-three out of every three hundred and sixty-five, and even then the inhabitants are afraid to complain, lest it might be worse with them. As Browne reflected upon these things, he understood something of what the life of Katherine's father in this dreadful place must be. Seeing that it was hopeless to venture out, and believing that it was impossible the men he expected could put in an appearance on such a day, Browne retired into his hut, and, having closed the door carefully, stirred up the fire, and, seating himself before it, lit a cigar. He had another day's weary waiting before him. Fortunately, when his boat had brought him ashore from the yacht, it had also brought him an ample supply of provisions and such other things as would help to make life bearable in such a place. On the rough table in the centre of the hut were arranged a collection of books of travel and adventure, and, since he did not pretend to be a blue-stocking, a good half-dozen novels, yellow-back and otherwise. One of the latter, a story by Miss Braddon, he remembered purchasing at the Dover bookstall the day he had returned from Paris with Maas. As he recalled the circumstances he could see again the eager,

bustling crowd upon the platform, the porters in their dingy uniforms, the bright lamps around the bookstalls, and the cheery clerk who had handed the novel to him, with a remark about the weather. How different was his position now! He opened the book and tried to interest himself in it; the effort, however, was in vain. Do what he would, he could not rivet his attention upon the story. The perilous adventures of the hero in the forests of Upper Canada only served to remind him of his own unavoidable position. Little by little the sentences ran into each other; at length his cigar dropped from his fingers, his head fell forward, and he was fast asleep. How long he slept it would be impossible to tell, but when he rose again and went to the door the fog had drawn off, darkness had fallen, and the brilliant northern stars were shining in the firmament above. Once more his hopes had proved futile. Another day had passed, and still he had received no news of the fugitives. How long was this to go on? Feeling hungry, he shut the door and set about preparing his evening meal. Taking a large piece of drift-wood from the heap in the corner, he placed it upon the fire, and soon the flame went roaring merrily up the chimney. He had made his tea, and was in the act of opening one of his cans of preserved meat, when a sound reached him from outside, and caused him to stop suddenly and glance round, as if in expectation of hearing something further. It certainly sounded like the step of some one who was carefully approaching the hut. Who could it be? The nearest civilisation was the township of Dui, which was upwards of a hundred versts away. He had been warned, also, that the forest was in many places tenanted by outlaws, whose presence would be far from desirable at any time. Before he went to the door to draw the bolts he was careful to feel in the pocket of his coat for his revolver. He examined it and satisfied himself that it was fully loaded and ready for use. Then, turning up the lamp, he approached the door, and called out in English, 'Who is there?'

'The powers be thanked, it's you!' said a voice which he plainly recognised as that of MacAndrew. 'Open the door and let us in, for we're more dead than alive.'

'Thank God you're come at last,' said Browne as he did as the other requested. A curious picture was revealed by the light which issued from the open door.

Standing before the hut was a tall man with a long gray beard, clad in a heavy cloak of the same colour, who held in his arms what looked more like a bundle of furs than a human being.

'Who are you?' cried Browne in astonishment, for this tall, gaunt individual of seventy was certainly not MacAndrew; 'and what have you got there?'

'I'll tell you everything in good time,' said the

other in English. ‘In the meantime just catch hold of this chap’s feet, and help me to carry him into the hut. I am not quite certain that he isn’t done for.’

Without asking any further questions, though he was dying to do so, Browne complied with the other’s request, and between them the two men carried the bundle into the hut and placed it in a chair before the fire.

‘Brandy!’ said MacAndrew laconically; and Browne immediately produced a flask from a bag and unscrewed the lid. He poured a quantity of the spirit into a cup and then placed it to the sick man’s lips, while MacAndrew chafed his hands and removed his heavy boots.

‘I have been expecting you for the last two days,’ said Browne as soon as they had time to speak to each other.

‘It couldn’t be managed,’ returned MacAndrew. ‘As it was I got away sooner than I expected. The pursuit was so hot that we were compelled to take to the woods, where, as ill-luck had it, we lost ourselves and have been wandering about for the last four days. It was quite by chance that we reached here at all. I believe another day would have seen the end of this fellow. He knocked up completely this morning.’

As he spoke the individual in the chair opened his eyes and gazed about him in a dazed fashion. Browne looked at him more carefully than he had yet done, and found a short man with a small bullet head, half of which was shaven, the remainder being covered with a ferocious crop of red hair. Though he would probably not have confessed so much, he was conscious of a feeling of intense disappointment, for, from what he had heard from Katherine and Madame Bernstein, he had expected to see a tall, aristocratic individual, who had suffered for a cause he believed to be just, and whom sorrow had marked for her own. This man was altogether different.

‘Monsieur Petrovitch,’ said Browne in a tone that might very well have suggested that he was anxious to assure himself as to the other’s identity; ‘or rather, I should say, Monsieur’—

‘Petrovitch will do very well for the present,’ the other replied in a querulous voice, as if he were tired, and did not want to be bothered by such minor details. ‘You are Monsieur Browne, I presume—my Katherine’s affianced husband?’

‘Yes, that is my name,’ the young man replied. ‘I cannot tell you how thankful your daughter will be to have you back with her once more.’

To this the man offered no reply, but sat staring into the fire with half-closed eyes. His behaviour

struck Browne unpleasantly. Could the man have lost his former affection for his daughter? If not, why was it he refrained from making further inquiries about the girl who had risked so much to save him? MacAndrew, however, stepped into the breach.

‘You will have to be a bit easy with him at first, Mr Browne,’ he said. ‘They are always like this when they first get free. You must remember that for a good many years he has never been asked to act or think for himself. I have seen many like this before. Once get him on board your yacht, away from every thought and association of his old life, and you will find that he will soon pick up again.’

‘And Madame Bernstein?’ said the man in the chair, as if he were continuing a train of thoughts suggested by their previous conversation.

‘She is very well,’ said Browne, ‘and is also anxiously awaiting your coming. She has taken the greatest possible interest in your escape.’

‘Ah!’ said the man, and then fell to musing again.

By this time Browne had placed before him a large bowl of smoking beef-extract, which had been prepared by a merchant in England who had little dreamt the use it would be put to in the Farthest East. As soon as the old man had satisfied his hunger, Browne led him to his own sleeping-place, and placed him upon it, covering him with the fur rugs. Then he returned to the table, and, seating himself at it, questioned MacAndrew, while the other stowed away an enormous meal as if to make up for the privations he had lately endured. From him Browne learnt all the incidents of their journey. Disguised as a Russian fur merchant, MacAndrew had made his way to the town of Dui, where he had made inquiries and located the man he wanted. At first it was difficult to get communication with him; but once that was done the rest was comparatively easy. They reached the forest and made for the coast, with the result that has already been narrated.

‘Between ourselves,’ said MacAndrew, ‘our friend yonder is scarcely the sort of man to travel with. He hasn’t the heart of a louse, and is as suspicious as a rat.’

Browne said nothing; he was thinking of Katherine, and what her feelings would be when he should present this man to her as the father she had so long revered. He began to think that it would have been better, not only for the man himself, but for all parties concerned, if he had left him to meet his fate on the island.



PLUMS AND PLUM-CULTURE.

AS the plum is found growing wild throughout the British Islands, it may be assumed to be indigenous in this country, and, as a consequence, capable of the most successful cultivation. This is proved by results; and the difference between plum-fruit grown in the southern parts of Great Britain and the same fruit grown in the northern parts of our island consists mainly in the fact that plum-fruit in Scotland is later in ripening than it is in the country south of the Tweed; and there is a compensating influence in the case of the northern-grown fruit, as, grown in a colder and more humid climate, it is more juicy than plum-fruit in England.

The successful cultivation of the plum is easily within the reach of every person who has a piece of garden ground of average fertility. Here, on dug ground—if possible following a crop of potatoes—let the intending plum-grower mark out the points where he intends to plant his young plum-trees. At each point where a tree is to be planted let the earth be taken out to the depth of a foot, with a diameter of two or three feet, according to the size of the roots of the tree about to be planted therein. Next, if possible, scatter a quantity of sand over the bottom of the prepared hole. Next drive a stout stake down the centre of the hole; this stake should rise at least four feet above the level of the ground. Then take the young tree, and place it in the prepared hole, and tie it securely to the stake with stout matting or other soft tying material. Next scatter sand all over the roots of the young tree, so as to cover them completely, and fill up the hole with good garden soil to a height six inches above the level of the ground around the tree. Proceed in the same fashion with all the trees that are to be planted; and finally cover the surface of the ground round each newly-planted tree with stable-manure of quantity sufficient to keep out the frost in winter and the drought in summer for the first year after planting.

It seems to be pretty much a matter of chance whether trees planted in autumn or those planted in spring will succeed best. If frosted soil be employed to fill up the holes where the trees are planted, it may be expected to be more harmful to young trees planted in autumn than to those planted in spring—say, in the end of March, when the temperature may be expected to improve each day as the sun rises higher in the sky, and his rays become more powerful in promoting growth; and it may be taken for granted that in all cases of a long-continued absence of rain a mulching of farm-yard manure sufficient to cover the surface of the ground all round the trees will be of great benefit.

The young trees, thus carefully planted in good soil, and secured to their stakes to keep them from being shaken at the roots, will in almost every case break into leaf in the spring months, perhaps a little later than old and well-established trees. They ought to take root and establish themselves firmly in the soil, and in most cases send out small shoots, by the end of summer. Should the summer after planting be characterised by hot, dry weather, it will be judicious to water; it will be better in such case to give a thorough wetting of the soil once a week rather than a moderate wetting of the soil once every day; and if farm-yard manure be spread over the ground when newly watered, the benefit to the trees will be much increased and rendered more lasting; and this treatment may be repeated at intervals while the drought lasts.

When in later years the fruit on the young trees begins to ripen, a quantity of soot may be put on the surface, so as to cover the mulch completely; this will help much to keep away snails, insects, &c., and will also, to some extent, accelerate the ripening of the fruit, besides improving its flavour. If the young trees have set a large crop of fruit, and it remain on the trees, it will be safest in the earlier years of their existence to remove the most of the young plums, leaving not more than one out of each cluster. In the fifth and sixth years after planting out, the young trees will most probably set an enormous crop of plums. It is nice to see this, as proving the fertility of the trees, but that is all. Were the enormous setting to be allowed to remain on the trees it would most certainly be very late in ripening, the plums would be of very small size, as well as deficient in flavour, and from a money point of view of not more than the fourth part of the value of full-sized plums, properly ripened. It is much better, therefore, to remove three-fourths of the young plums in the case of an immense set on young trees. This should be done when they attain the size of peas.

As regards the sorts recommended for planting, the Victoria plum has the first claim on the favourable regard of the planter, in its appearance—looking to size, colour, and shape—and also in the quality of the fruit; in these respects its claims are of the highest order. It is also an abundant cropper; a well-grown tree in a favourable season may be counted upon to bear a crop weighing upwards of two hundred pounds. Whether eaten raw or cooked, it is one of the most enjoyable of plums, and is the most largely planted of all. It is also an early kind, ripening in August and the beginning of September, according as the season is early or late.

The next sort recommended is a variety called the Early Prolific, which ripens its fruit a fort-

night or three weeks earlier than the Victoria plum. The fruit of the Early Prolific is mostly used cooked. However, when fully ripe it is very agreeable for dessert, and can with safety be eaten in much greater quantity than almost any other.

Another favourite is an early sort named Prince of Wales. Its flavour is quite distinct, as well as the colour of the fruit when fully ripe. It does not succeed with every grower, however, nor in every place; and even when it is apparently doing extremely well from every point of view, it disappoints its owner by suddenly dying. However, it produces very pretty fruit, and is very early.

Another plum deserving very high commendation bears the name of Prince Englebert. An excellent grower, it is, when fully grown, one of the largest, if not the very largest, of plum-trees. The fruit is large and of agreeable flavour; preserves made from it are also among the most enticing in respect of flavour. It has been frequently observed, too, that a visitor let loose in a plum-orchard to eat his fill will consume more fruit of this plum than any other kind.

A plum that deserves to be grown by every cultivator is the Yellow Magnum. The fruit is of great size and of a beautiful yellow colour. The tree, however, frequently dies without any assignable cause; it is most successfully grown as a standard.

A newer variety than any yet mentioned is styled the Sultan, which, in regard to form, colour, and size, seems to surpass all other plums. It is a vigorous grower, with few large branches, and these having few smaller branches in them. Tested by the weight of its crop, this variety comes out very well, though the quality of the fruit is not of the highest order. In all other respects it is a leading plum, well worthy of a place in every garden where fruit is grown. The colour of the fruit is a rich crimson-purple, and in its shape is round like a ball.

Another kind deserving of being planted largely for its size and appearance is the Czar. The fruit is large, and produced in more abundance than in the case of the Sultan. It is one of those kinds whose fruit when ripe can be eaten in large quantity without injury; for, like the Prince Englebert plum mentioned already, it is of easy digestion. The Czar is also a great cropper. Unfortunately the smaller birds are very fond of its buds in spring-time, and eat them in great quantity; hence the tree needs to have the birds scared away from it at that season by the use of slips of tin or tin boxes swinging about with the wind.

A plum of American origin, named from its raiser the Jefferson, is not surpassed for excellence by any other kind whatever. The only fault of its fruit—if it can be called a fault—is that it is too rich and good. Hardly any one can with safety eat as much of the fruit as he would like after having once tasted it. The knowledge of its excellence is not confined to the human species;

birds and all the insect tribes within reach gather themselves in full force for the feast whenever the fruit is ripe, or even only approaching ripeness; and in a single afternoon a crop of forty or fifty pounds in weight may be entirely consumed. The only thing the owner of the tree can do in case of a general attack of the insect world upon his Jefferson plums is to get a basket at once and pull the entire crop, ripe and unripe, carry them to a room in his house, and cover them with paper, taking care that door and window are carefully closed to keep the insect world at bay.

The next plum recommended for planting is an early sort, the earliest variety that is at the same time a good cropper; it is called the Early Prolific, and it well deserves its name. As a great bearer, it requires very generous treatment year after year, even when, as sometimes happens, the blossom is destroyed in spring; for, with good cultivation and liberal application of bone-meal, as well as a covering of the ground within a radius of six feet all round, the weight of a good crop can be doubled, and the quality of the fruit equally much improved. This plum is mainly grown for cooking purposes and for preserves. When the trees have been generously treated, however, the fruit, improved largely as a consequence, is very pleasing to the palate, and is greedily eaten by young folks. The tree is not a great grower, and commences bearing fruit at an early date in its existence. Under ordinary cultivation the fruit is small, but with high cultivation the size of the fruit is doubled.

Another kind that deserves to be grown—for its great size if for nothing else—is that called Pond's Seedling. This variety, though of very great vigour in its growth, can hardly be regarded as a great bearer in regard to the number of its fruit, but in the weight of the individual fruit it takes very high rank. The fruit is egg-shaped; in colour it is not unlike the Victoria plum; hence, with its great size and brilliant hue, it has a very taking appearance. The tree is a steady bearer year after year if it is generously manured every year.

Another sort, and the last to be recommended, is fit for cooking alone. This is the Goliath plum, a great bearer. The fruit is not usually eaten, but when cooked is most excellent. It is a prolific bearer and a good grower, but should not be allowed to carry fruit till the tree has grown to a considerable size. In this way only can the fruit be had in its complete development of size and quality.

There are many other sorts, more or less resembling those already described, of excellent quality, especially those of the gage family; in this last case the variety recommended—the Jefferson gage—is so much superior in size and appearance to all the others that it may safely be asserted that it holds the field. Year by year

new sorts of plums are raised from seed, and of these many of the most select are offered as improvements on the old and time-honoured varieties; but after most of these new sorts have been tested the answer generally is, 'The old is better.' Certainly, if any of the new sorts raised in America get a fair trial it will be largely owing to the excellence everywhere acknowledged of the Jefferson gage.

After the plums have been planted and made a fair start in growth, two or three years at the least will pass before they bear any fruit. During this period their roots will be busier in the earth, some distance below, extending and taking a firm hold of the soil. If the soil is at all of average fertility, no help in the shape of manure of any description should be given till the young trees have borne at least one crop of fruit. After a start has been made of fruit-bearing, plum-trees should receive every year a supply of manure to enable them to keep up and increase their fertility and to ripen their fruit. Bone-meal or bone-dust dug into the ground all round the tree is a great help. Roughly speaking, the branches of the plum-tree are said to extend themselves from the tree itself as far as the roots have extended themselves below ground. Every year, therefore, after the crops of plums have been removed from the trees, the soil all round the trees should be dug to a depth of not more than four inches, and bone-dust or bone-meal be scattered in the small trench already made. As the trees increase in size and fertility, the branches and roots will run farther out from the stem of the tree; and as the area of ground thus permeated by the roots increases in extent, the quantity of bone-meal dug into the soil around each tree will require to be increased. But the return in the shape of excellent fruit will much more than repay the outlay on bone-meal. Suppose that as much as a stone of bone-meal be applied to each tree. Well, the cost of this quantity will not be more than a shilling, and the increase in the quantity of plums and the size of each individual plum will certainly be twofold; and, as a pound of big plums is worth two pounds of small ones of the same sort, the advantage of doing anything and everything that will increase the size of the fruit is at once

apparent. Farm-yard manure applied to the surface of the soil all round the trees will keep the roots in a proper state to send up moisture into the branches to feed the growing fruit and give it size and quality. A moderate quantity of soot scattered on the surface will keep snails at a respectable distance; and the same sown thickly for the breadth of not more than six inches at the foot of wall trees will keep away earwigs, woodlice, and other enemies of the fruit-grower, and minimise his losses.

When the plum-tree has reached the seventh year of its existence as a fruit-bearing tree, it will be beginning to show by the appearance of its oldest branches that these require to be cut off to make room for the more vigorous and younger growth, which in the case of strong, healthy plum-trees ought to be showing and asserting itself every year. These vigorous, strong, upright-growing shoots or branches invariably produce the largest and most beautiful fruit. When plum-trees are kept in healthy growth by an abundant supply of manure—farm-yard or chemical—the branches that have borne heavy crops of fruit ought to be removed after not more than three years. In this way a constant succession of young, vigorous, fertile growths will year by year be produced by these healthy trees. But, to maintain this constant succession of fertile shoots and branches, there must be yearly application of bone-meal to the soil where the plum is growing, to enable it to maintain its fertility; and if the owner of the plum-trees has it within his power to apply manure-water from the farm-yard, the return from such application, especially in the months when the fruit is growing and ripening, will be immense and immediate, doubling the size and weight of the fruit, and at the same time more than doubling its value.

The number of varieties of plums—though much smaller than the varieties of apples and pears—is very considerable. But most plums have a great many different names—some of them about a dozen or even more. Hence it is quite possible that a plum-grower with thirty differently named plum-trees may really have only half-a-dozen different kinds.

A DEAN OF ST PAUL'S.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT in Heaven's name could it all mean? Dr Cole asked himself. Surely the words 'traitor,' 'learn our intentions,' 'bring us to the block,' which drifted in a disjointed fashion to his ears, were not intended either to apply to him or to refer to the terms of the mandate which he had sup-

posed he was entrusted with? How he wished now he had never left his comfortable deanery for the insane purpose of carrying Her Highness's commands into this savage country—for what else was Ireland but a barbarous land? Ah! if he had only declined. For was it not manifest that a live ass was any day better than a dead lion; that it was better by far to be Dean of St Paul's,

even if he never attained his ambition—episcopal rank—than to languish for years in an Irish dungeon—mayhap suffer beneath an Irish headsman?

Earnestly conversing, comparing notes, gesticulating, and peering again and again into the cloak-bag, the Lord-Deputy and his companions returned to the table and resumed their seats.

'Do you, sir?' asked the former, 'know the precise nature of the business on which you allege yourself to have been sent over to us?'

'To be sure,' was the Dean's confident reply. His spirits were beginning to rise again, although he did not care for the Lord-Deputy's manner, nor his use of the term 'allege'; and the thought flitted through his mind that, perhaps, he had been personally named in the commission, and that the extraordinary powers delegated to him had so astounded the Irish Council that its members were now beginning to repent of the courtesy with which they had received him. 'To be sure,' he said a second time, 'or else your lordship'—

'Have the goodness, then, sir, to give us an outline of its nature.'

'My personal opinion,' said the Dean, who did not care for the speaker's manner, 'is that Her Highness is displeased with the laxity with which, in defiance of her express commands to the contrary, the Irish Protestants have been treated by your lordships.'

'Quite so,' remarked the Bishop of Meath pleasantly, a deceptive smile playing over his mobile features; 'of course. What else would bring you here but to see that we return to our duty? That, however, Mr Dean, is your personal—in more ways than one—opinion. Now for Queen Mary's actual commands.'

'As I have said once, so I say again,' rejoined the Dean sulkily, objecting to what he considered a needlessly high-handed form of interrogation, 'your lordships will find all needful instructions within the despatch-case.'

'So be it,' was the Lord-Deputy's reply, as a broad smile went round the assembly. 'But did Her Highness give you no intimation as to the exact nature of—er—the—er—er—the document you affirm she committed to your care?'

'None beyond this fact: the leather case contained commands to which your lordships were to rigidly adhere in your future dealings with the heretics.'

The Lord-Deputy paused. With a perplexed look he turned to the Bishop of Meath, who whispered some words in his ear with observable emphasis.

'What?' he asked, again addressing himself to the Dean—'what was the nature of your interview with the Queen?'

Dr Cole was at a total loss to account for this continued cross-examination. If they thought, however, they were going to trap him into a betrayal of confidence, the Lords of the Irish

Council never made a greater mistake, he told himself.

'What has that to do with your lordships?' said he in an insolent manner.

'Very true, and a most pertinent if not impertinent question,' interposed the Bishop of Meath, with feigned amusement, the while twisting—as was his manner when aroused—his episcopal ring round and round his index-finger. 'What has it to do with us at all? I confess I cannot say, save that, perhaps, you might, Mr Dean, spare yourself grave future unpleasantness by being a little more explicit and,' as if an afterthought, 'a little more courteous.'

'Tis no great matter, after all, since you force me to it,' the Dean replied, again taking alarm at the veiled threat underlying the Bishop's suavity and geniality. 'Her Highness,' he continued complacently, 'sent for me, and placing yonder leather case in my hands, bade me carry it across to your lordships without delay. "Mr Dean," Her Highness said, "reposing all trust in your well-known discretion, we bid you tarry not, but hasten to our Council in Dublin. Without loss of time, place this instrument in our Lord-Deputy's hands, and return hither and report to us what has passed between you." Tis true,' the speaker went on, visibly swelling with pride, 'Her Highness added that I was the only divine she would dare send forth on such an errand.'

'Ha!' said the Primate, with a frown, as the Lord-Deputy chuckled aloud, 'perchance some deep meaning underlay the Queen's words?'

'I know not,' the Dean answered in a deprecating fashion, as much as to say, 'Think not for a moment I am going to give you the actual words employed.' 'That matter,' he added, 'rests entirely with your lordships.'

'It most certainly does. Said Queen Mary no more?' asked the Bishop of Meath.

'Let me see? Yes,' reflectively; 'Her Highness observed that a sight of the enclosed would gladden the heart of the Lord-Deputy, and that she was convinced his lordship, recognising a duty which was a pleasure, would lose no time in acting.'

At this commonplace observation, to Dr Cole's extreme surprise, the Lord-Deputy, dropping his habitual gravity of manner, sprang to his feet, and, white and trembling with rage, asked:

'Since this—tapping the despatch-case—came into your possession, has it ever left your keeping?'

'It never has,' was the decided reply.

'No opportunity occurred on your journey for its being tampered with?'

'None,' Dr Cole replied, with great indignation. He well remembered exhibiting the case to the Mayor of Chester, yet for the sake of his reputed discretion he was not going to admit the fact. 'And what is more,' he continued, 'not a soul ever got so much as a glimpse of it!'

'Then, my lords, that clinches the matter. He'—pointing to the Dean—is convicted out of his own mouth, and I submit that for our own safety my suggestion should be acquiesced in,' cried the Bishop of Meath in a ringing voice.

'Ay, ay,' exclaimed the Lord-Deputy, rapidly scribbling a few lines on a loose sheet of paper. 'We must show this impudent rogue he cannot beard us and treat us as fools with impunity, whatever he may be in the habit of doing on the other side of the Channel.'

"Convicted out of my own mouth," I a "rogue," in his turn, Dr Cole, jumping to his feet, shouted aloud. 'What means your lordship by addressing me in such terms? Her Highness shall hear'—

'Silence, fool,' said the Lord-Deputy in a tone of thunder. 'This case contains no royal commission—no despatch of any kind from Her Highness. Investigate the contents for yourself.'

The Dean of St Paul's blanched to his very forehead. A cold perspiration broke out over his brow. If the Lord-Deputy's statement were true, then he need never more show his face in London. And yet, what could it all mean? Who could—

'Come, sir, come,' said the same voice sternly. 'Do as you are bid.'

Dr Cole seized the cloak-bag with his trembling hands, and carefully lifted the despatch-case out. Then, opening the latter with extreme care, as if he feared it might contain some highly dangerous explosive, he brought it beneath the range of his vision.

Heavens! what was it that met his astonished gaze? In place of a royal commission, which he had thought would undoubtedly prove the stepping-stone to a bishopric, a pack of common dirty playing-cards, with that symbol of derision, the grinning knave of clubs, face uppermost, confronted him.

'My lord,' he cried in a terrified voice, as he realised that he stood on the brink of a most perilous precipice, 'there is some fiend's work here. Your lordship is pleased to make merry at my expense.'

The Bishop of Meath, with a malicious smile, inserted his hand into the despatch-box, and, withdrawing the pack of cards, exposed the knave of clubs to the astonished assemblage, crying :

'A pretty royal commission indeed! The devil's picture-book, and rightly so called. A sight of them was to gladden the Lord-Deputy's heart—eh, Mr Dean? He would recognise wherein lay his duty, and cheerfully perform it? Yes, of course.'

The Dean sank into his chair with a low moan. He was in a position of extreme peril. Far from home and friends, he was in the power of the turbulent and hot-headed Irish lords, whose ire he had roused by his continued insolence of

manner. He looked vainly round the room for some means of escape, but saw none; and then his eyes, returning to the table, alit on that grinning knave of clubs, which, to his distorted fancy, appeared to be mocking and jeering at him.

'Sir,' the Lord-Deputy said after a short consultation with his colleagues, 'though not provided by Her Highness on your hitherward journey with any credentials, I now hasten to supply the omission. This—raising aloft the sheet of paper whereon he had previously scribbled a few lines—'will ensure you such hospitality and good cheer as our prison of the Marshalsea can boast. It is'—

'My lord—my lord,' gasped the Dean, 'be ware how you treat me. Jugglery has'—

'I am quite warranted in sending you to the block under the circumstances,' said the Lord-Deputy in a hard, cold voice. 'You arrive here without any letters of introduction; your commission turns out to be an insult to us all; we can receive no reply to our communication respecting yourself. Under false pretences you have obtained an entry into the Council and heard matters of State discussed. You have committed a most serious crime,' the speaker went on with increasing severity, 'for we have notice that Her Highness is not only seriously ill, but that certain ill-conditioned ruffians, in clerical garb, hoping to curry favour with the future sovereign, are ranging the kingdom and essaying to penetrate into the various Councils.'

'I swear before heaven I had Her Highness's commands to'—

'Travel to Ireland to deliver a pack of cards, to insult the Lord-Deputy to his face! Pish! For shame, Mr Dean, or whatever else you be,' cried the Bishop of Meath derisively.

'You are about to be treated with greater leniency than you deserve. You will be confined in the Marshalsea prison until we have had matters satisfactorily explained by the English Council. Your future depends on the tenor of the reply which crosses the Channel. If favourable,' the Lord-Deputy continued, assuming a judicial manner, 'or, rather, if not incriminatory, you will be permitted to leave Dublin. But, on the other hand, sir, if you are unknown, or your mission is disowned, you will leave your cell for the scaffold.'

'And, Mr Dean,' the Metropolitan added as Dr Cole was led away between two of the Council guards, 'you should have no difficulty in reconciling yourself to your fate. Remember how many of the victims, persecuted at your instigation, you have accompanied to the stake, and bear in mind the lesson you sought to impress on them: that death is deprived of all its terrors to the true believer.'

The Very Reverend Dr Henry Cole entered the

'Blue Posts' inn on his return journey a sadder, but it is to be doubted whether a wiser man. After eight monotonous weeks of confinement, he had, one morning, been liberated and summoned before the Lord-Deputy of Ireland. The latter had bidden the Dean quit the country within twenty-four hours, unless he wished his clerical brother, the Bishop of Meath, to lay hands on his person. He had added that no one save the Dean himself was to blame for the unfortunate misunderstanding which had arisen, and again warning him to keep out of harm's way, had summarily dismissed the unfortunate divine from his presence.

On communicating with the Council in London, the Irish Council, after some delay, had been astonished to learn that their previous communication had been overlooked owing to the ill-health of the Queen, but that Dr Cole had in reality been sent across the Channel on an important matter, and that he was, or should have been, the bearer of a royal commission bearing on ecclesiastical matters. The authorities in the English Metropolis were at a loss to account for the miscarriage of the royal mandate, and ordered the envoy's instant release, adding that he was to be commanded to return to render an explanation of his extraordinary conduct.

Here was a nice state of affairs; and although some consolation was to be derived from the fact that, in this instance at least, the Irish Bishops had put their feet down, and had evaded compliance with clerical interference from London, the Lord-Deputy foresaw endless trouble. His colleagues, too, recognised that they could look for nothing but the most bitter hostility at the hands of the English divine when he reached London and contrived to gain the royal ear; and they hesitated to release the Dean, thinking, perhaps, that a little sober reflection in jail would cause him to view the deplorable occurrence in a more favourable light. It was whilst the Council were debating as to their future steps in the matter that the news arrived in Dublin that the Queen had breathed her last, and that the Princess Elizabeth, her half-sister, had been proclaimed in her place. Here was an easy solution of the difficulty. There was sufficient guarantee in this fact of their being free from molestation at his hands in the future to render it safe to deport the Dean, and this was consequently done, with little loss of time and a display of still less courtesy or regret.

To say that the Dean was disheartened at the result of his mission would be to describe his feelings in the mildest manner. He was, however, more greatly disturbed at Mary's—his patron's—death. Had she lived he would have explained matters to her satisfaction, and there was no ground for doubt but that his royal mistress would have severely punished her Irish officials and at the same time rewarded himself. At least

so the Dean thought. Now, with Elizabeth, a Protestant princess, on the throne, the incident assumed another complexion, for was it not well known—

'Come in,' he cried irritably in response to repeated rapping on the door of the very apartment in which, on his outward journey, he had interviewed the Mayor of Chester. 'In Heaven's name come in, and stop that noise,' he shouted.

The door opened slowly, and, with mock humility, Sir Lawrence Smith, accompanied by a stranger, carrying an enormous roll of paper, entered.

'Who is this, sir?' demanded the Dean angrily, gazing at the stranger.

'Henry Hardware, the right worshipful the new Mayor of Chester,' replied the ex-Mayor solemnly.

'What is his business? What the cause of this unseemly intrusion?' asked Dr Cole passionately.

'Here, reverend sir,' exclaimed the stranger, 'is a complete list, with the ages, the occupations, the addresses, and the names of reputed heretics and their reputed sympathisers. On learning your commands from Sir Lawrence, whom I succeeded in the mayoral office, I at once proceeded to—'

'Confusion to the pair of you!' cried the Dean, now thoroughly enraged, observing the look of intense amusement which sat on Henry Hardware's features.

'And here, reverend sir,' cried Mrs Mottershead, as she advanced into the room, with a profound curtsey—'here "is what will lash those heretical rascals in Ireland,"' laying on the table as she spoke a long parchment document, folded lengthwise, and bearing in one corner a dangling seal suspended by a ribbon.

The Dean could scarce believe the evidence of his eyes. There was the identical commission the disappearance of which had occasioned him such insult and degradation; and here was the tavern-keeper smiling broadly—ay, and actually winking at Sir Lawrence Smith and his worship the new Mayor.

Then, to the accompaniment of jeering remarks and loud bursts of laughter from the small knot of citizens who had assembled, at the landlady's invitation, on the landing outside, the Dean of St Paul's learned that, passing down from the bedroom which she had been preparing for his use, Mrs Mottershead had caught his remark about the 'lashing' of the 'Irish heretics.' She had a brother in Dublin who professed the Reformed faith. Prompted by an affectionate regard for his safety, during his reverence's journey downstairs with the Mayor she had slipped into the room unobserved by any one, had opened the leatheren case, and, taking out the commission, had in lieu thereof inserted a pack of cards. Ignorant of this change, his reverence

had carefully packed up the box, with the results already described.

It must not be supposed that the Dean obtained this information in the concise fashion given above. After much cross-examination and by dint of resorting to threats, which provoked the unqualified merriment of the spectators, Dr Cole eventually unravelled the mystery. His rage was unbounded. Speechless with passion, he was just able to cry out that he would see Mrs Mottershead was well repaid for her tampering with the late Queen's despatches.

Good as his word, Dr Henry Cole, after considerable trouble, contrived to obtain an audience of Her Highness the Queen. To her he narrated his pitiful story, asking for the punishment of the Irish lords, and above all of Mrs Mottershead, at whose door he laid the blame for all the disasters which had overtaken him. But the Doctor had been forestalled by Sir Lawrence Smith. The latter, on giving up the office of Mayor, had been made acquainted by Mrs Mottershead of the trick she had played. Without loss of time he hastened to London, and obtained audience of the new Queen, to whom he

described the circumstances in such a humorous fashion that that august individual, so far from exhibiting any signs of resentment, had dismissed the knight with a promise that the tavern-keeper should be molested in no way.

The Dean, not being aware of this circumstance, stated his case in his most impressive fashion. But beyond being heartily scoffed at—Elizabeth's laughter was immoderate as she pictured the Irish Council gazing in consternation at a knave of clubs in place of a royal commission—and thoroughly rated by Her Highness, who commented strongly on the gross carelessness with which he had acted, the Dean was threatened with deprivation, and dismissed.

'Go home, sirrah!' cried the Queen, 'and make no further appearance at our court, else we may be tempted to have ye whipped and your ears cropped.'

It was only some time later Dr Cole learned that his ill-timed intervention had recalled the episode to Her Highness, who straightway rewarded the ingenuity and affectionate zeal of Mrs Mottershead with a life-pension of forty pounds a year.

THE RAT OF FUNAFUTI.

THE rat occupies a unique position in the natural conditions of Funafuti. Excluding the birds and a few lizards, the indigenous terrestrial vertebrate fauna appears to be comprised in it. Among the investigations recently carried out in the Funafuti atoll, in the Ellice group of Polynesia, none is more interesting than that relating to this ubiquitous little quadruped of the atolls and other islands in the great South Sea.

Much of the literature of this sunny portion of the globe contains mention of a native rat, without, for the most part, any technical description of the animal being attempted. Peale, however, described rats obtained from widely separated islands; and it seems probable the rat from all the Pacific islands may be referred to this species. Indeed, the fine Maori rat of New Zealand is, in all probability, also identical with the same form. There are specimens in the British Museum from the Fiji Islands, Norfolk Island, and New Caledonia. Moreover, this view is supported by Maori tradition, to the effect that 'the kumara or sweet potato, the taro, the calabash-plant, . . . the rat kiore, the pukeko, and the green parrot kakariki are said to have been imported from Hawaiki.' This traditional ancestral home is considered by modern ethnologists to be Savaii, one of the Samoan Islands.

Immense, then, and therefore of particular interest, is the geographical distribution of the

Pacific rat. In the West Pacific there runs an enormous chain of islands, extending in a semi-circular sweep from the Marshall Archipelago, north of the equator, to the Austral or Tubuai Islands in the south-east; and from each of the main links of this long chain we possess records of the occurrence of the native rat, while of localities to the eastward and westward of the direct chain very many have been published; the list is closed by the inclusion of New Zealand as the last rat-inhabited island to the south. Its north-eastern limit is suggested by a statement that 'rats and mice have always been a pest on the Hawaiian Islands; and the old Hawaiian, before the introduction of cats, used a bow and arrows to destroy them. There can be little doubt that the rat exists, or rather did exist, at one time or another on all the islands of the Pacific. That ocean being bounded by the land masses of Asia, Australia, South and North America, and the genus *Mus* being exclusively confined to the Old World, it must have entered these islands from an Asiatic source; consequently this is opposed to the theory of a migration westward from America, across a Mesozoic Pacific continent, as advocated by some naturalists.'

On the Funafuti atoll the rat goes by the name of *tikimoa*. Unlike its European relative, it is usually said to feed only on vegetables or fruit; in Mangaia, in the Cook group, only upon coco-nuts, bananas, arrowroot, candle-nuts, and papao (*parypave*) apples; growing coco-nuts being

generally defended from its depredations by the making of a sort of screen cleverly secured all round the tree, close to the fronds, at a great height from the ground. On the Tonga Islands roasted coco-nut was used as a bait. In these islands it is supposed to live chiefly on sugarcane and bread-fruit; and some add the pandanus, pronouncing the fruit of this plant to be the staple food of the rat. The stomach of the Funafuti example when examined contained a white vegetable substance, possibly coco-nut or pandanus. The Maori kiore, said to be extinct, was frugivorous. Considering the vast numbers of these (the New Zealand) rats that periodically congregate round the homes of settlers in the bush, the mischief done by them is extremely small. This is owing to their food during the time being green vegetables. In kitchen-gardens they are certainly annoying, devouring peas, beans, cabbages, and even onions as they appear above ground, climbing up poles to nip off the shoots of the vines, &c.' Were the rat partially carnivorous, it is suggested it would be found to prey upon the land crabs and molluscs on the shore. Such, however, is not the case. If it preceded the human inhabitants of the atolls, the pandanus, being indigenous, would probably be its principal food; and as the coco-nuts and other fruits and vegetables were introduced, it would acquire a taste for these edibles.

Vegetation also serves for its dwelling. In Funafuti the coco-nut trees, just at the base of the fronds, are selected; and the rats have been frequently noticed peeping out of the matting that sheathes the butts of the fronds, and scampering about the heads of palms fifteen or twenty feet high. They likewise nest in the crowns of tree ferns, under the roots of trees, in tufts of grass, and among rushes. On the ground they seem awkward creatures, but are excellent climbers, ascending trunks with the nimbleness of flies, and scudding out to the very extremities of the branches. Hence, when pursued they invariably make for trees, if any are within reach. Taking up abode in the thatched roof of houses they become a plague, sallying forth at night in such numbers as to be exceedingly troublesome.

But, as elsewhere, the native rat has a great enemy; when brought into competition with the common brown rat of Europe, introduced by ships throughout the world, it usually disappears—an example of the evils of the influx of aliens. The depredations of the latter are such that in Funafuti the indigenous breed has been driven from the village, and indeed almost exterminated upon the main islet by the foreign rat; in many of the islands it has been completely rooted out. Even more deadly onslaught has been carried on against it by the domestic cats, which, originally brought over by missionaries, and afterwards emigrating to the bush, have proved of service in destroying the rats. In the old days, when unchecked, rats literally overran most of

the islands of the Pacific. On moonlight nights hundreds have been often seen gathered together round the native quarters, feeding upon waste rice or bread thrown out. A large bottle-shaped hole was dug in the earth in Mangaia, and baited with candle-nuts, of which rats are excessively fond; and when the hole was pretty well filled with rats, two men would go down with knobbed sticks to kill them. A hole which would contain two men would hold a goodly number of rats! Rat-killing under these conditions would seem anything but an enviable task. Keeping the rats within bounds was a matter of such importance with the inhabitants that in Funafuti, by law, each individual was at times obliged to catch and destroy a certain number, for which purpose an ingenious trap was employed. The natives destroy the rats with another object, shooting them for sport. *Fauna gooma*, or rath-shooting, as practised on Hoonga in the Tonga group, apparently was an amusement reserved for chiefs, and was undertaken with much ceremony. Attracted by bait previously distributed, the rats were shot with formidable unfeathered arrows six feet long. The game was not an individual but a party affair, the side first killing ten rats being accounted the winners; and, if the rats were plentiful, three or four games were generally played.

A still more interesting reason for the native destruction of rats may be mentioned: in many of the islands they formed an article of food. Necessity may have originated the custom; yet the flesh must have been regarded as very delicious, for the Mangaians have a proverb, 'Sweet as a rat.' Owing to the nature of its food, the native specimen would be less objectionable than the omnivorous European rat, which was nowhere utilised.

The entertaining writer Gill affords a glimpse of the cooking of rats as practised in Mangaia: 'Tamangoru, a solitary cannibal, on one occasion discovered two boys roasting a number of rats over a fire—a joyful sight for a famishing Mangaian; he ambiguously remarked, "Cooked rats are capital eating." The word "rats" thus used might apply to the lads as well as to the little quadrupeds. A cooked boy would be indifferently called a "fish" or a "rat." These two brothers subsisted chiefly by rat-catching, in which they were adepts. . . . They thrust long green reeds through the rats, eight on each reed, and grilled them over the fire. There were four skewers or reeds of rats—that is, thirty-two in all. When the rats were done, the elder took two reeds of rats (sixteen) to Tamangoru; the famished man greedily devoured them and called for the remaining two reeds.'

Curiously, in the neighbouring island of Rarotonga rats were not eaten, the people reviling the natives of Mangaia as the rat-eating Mangaians. Nor did the habit obtain in Funafuti, notwithstanding that this small mammal was the sole member of its class.

THE AWFUL STORY OF HELEY CROFT.

By A. S. APPELBEET

HELEY CROFT is the best old house in the town of Fensham. It is a quaintly-gabled structure of Elizabethan date, covered with white stucco and wistaria, and abutting right on the main street of the town at its juncture with North Lane. At the end of the North Lane front of Heley Croft there are two or three cottages which run up into the corner of the Croft, one being almost embedded in its crooked walls. Otherwise, the house is surrounded on two sides with a garden—a genuine old-fashioned affair, with a lawn like velvet and the shade of some venerable elms.

When Whyte took the place he had just purchased a partnership with the Beddards, the family solicitors of Fensham, and he had also just married a young wife. I saw a good deal of the Whytes about this time. Curiously enough I had known them both years before they first knew each other and surprised their friends by their mutual attachment. It was a strange marriage, for Tommy Whyte was a smart, level-headed man of the world, and Margaret—Mrs Whyte I suppose I should call her—was a successful opera-singer, an ethereal beauty, who had been wholly wrapped in her art since she was a child, and whose purity of character and superb voice had captivated the world as soon as she appeared behind the footlights. In ordinary affairs she was a baby, but she and Tommy got on like turtle-doves.

I see from my diary that it was 17th October when the story of Heley Croft began for me. I had had a heavy day for a country town—forty-one patients; and, feeling tired in the evening, I stepped across the street after dinner to have a chat and a cigar with Whyte.

'This is providential, old man,' was his greeting. 'My wife has been upset all day, and would not hear of my sending for you. She says there's nothing the matter; but it would ease my mind if you would have a look at her.'

I smiled at the young husband's anxiety, but received a shock when we had hunted up Mrs Whyte. She had the pallor and heavy expression of sleeplessness, and sat in a listless attitude; but, worse than that, her beautiful eyes had acquired a foreign expression—one of abject terror. Her whole bearing was utterly strange to her, and I could not ascertain that there was anything to account for her indisposition. Her state was a puzzle. It seemed that Whyte had gone up to town the previous day on business, and had been detained overnight, but not unexpectedly. When he arrived home he found his wife just as I had seen her, and not a syllable of explanation could she offer.

We sat up chatting long after Mrs Whyte had retired to rest, at my suggestion; and Whyte explained to me, with an agitated expression, that she had imperatively desired him to occupy a spare bedroom which looked out into the street, whilst she had gone to her usual chamber. This was on the other side of the house, and had a big window commanding the garden.

'I humoured her, of course,' he said; 'but, all the same, I do not understand the wish. She seemed so very intent upon it.'

'No doubt,' I replied, 'she is only afraid of restlessness, and wants you to be fit for work to-morrow. I can see she had a poor night last night. I will look in again to-morrow.'

'But listen, Aspley,' objected Whyte. 'She says she is not ill, and that there is no need to see you further professionally. In fact, she says she won't see you.'

'With a little romanceing, I dare say I can find a reason for coming,' I laughed. 'Don't worry yourself.'

Well, next day I went to Heley Croft again in the evening, and I found Whyte had worried himself. His wife was worse—much worse. She had just the air of a woman thoroughly run down, and her fixed gaze of horror was quite trying to look at. She appeared about five years older, too. The transformation in twenty-four hours was so marked that it gave me a disagreeable surprise, and the unfortunate husband was quite distracted.

'She persists,' he confided to me, 'that she will be alone at night, and it was during last night that she got so much worse. I never heard a sound, although I had a sleepless time myself through the anxiety.'

I prescribed a mild tonic and a change of scene for a few days, for really there was nothing in the British Pharmacopeia to meet the case as far as I could make it out.

Whyte had only just come home from his honeymoon, and it made the Beddards grumble when he took himself off for another week; but he went with his wife to Malvern, where an intimate friend of mine is in practice. There was no need to consult him, for Mrs Whyte got rapidly better, and looked almost herself when she returned to Heley Croft. While she was away, too, we tried a little experiment, and invented an excuse for putting one of the servants in her room at night, for I could not somehow divest my mind of the idea that there was some connection between the two solitary nights and the illness. We might have saved ourselves the trouble. The servant made no complaint.

I met the Whytes at the station accidentally when they returned, and was so much reassured

that I began to feel rather foolish at having been so very interested in the case. Judge of my astonishment, therefore, when at the breakfast-table next morning the following note was handed to me from Tommy :

'DEAR ASPLEY,—Come across at once, for God's sake. Margaret is much worse than before.'

'T. W.'

I hastened across to Heley Croft, and Whyte himself met me at the door, looking terribly alarmed.

'It is worse than ever,' he said as he conducted me inside. 'Maggie would be alone last night, and when I got up this morning she was simply deathly. What the dickens can be the matter?'

The patient's appearance more than confirmed his words. She was in a shocking state of prostration, and could scarcely rise or speak.

'Tom,' I said, 'I want a confidential chat with your wife.'

He took the hint, and went out. We sat in her old-fashioned, oak-panelled boudoir or morning-room, and I plunged into the matter at once.

'My dear lady,' I said, 'if your husband had to defend a case he would require to know all the facts, whichever way they might tell, and then use his own judgment. Now, forgive me, you are keeping something back. You must be cured; but we cannot get at the seat of the trouble till we know all about it. You really must trust me with what you have been hiding from Tom.'

Her whole frame trembled and shuddered; but she made no answer.

I pressed the matter again, and then she spoke, in little more than a terrified whisper.

'Dr Aspley,' she murmured, 'you would not believe me. It is too horrible.'

'On the contrary,' I replied, 'we doctors have to believe what seems to be impossible every day. I won't rest till I know the worst. I promise to believe you.'

She shuddered again.

'Ugh!' she said. 'It is horrible! It is killing me!'

'It may kill you if you won't let me help,' I replied. 'But there is no reason why it should, if you let me fight it.'

'Dr Aspley,' she asked, turning up her beautiful but horror-struck eyes, 'can you fight occult powers?'

'Certainly,' I said. 'Why not? Occult powers are only disordered cerebrations.'

There were, fortunately, no theosophists present.

'Could you,' she went on, 'arrest the hand of God?'

'Of course,' I replied, with, I am afraid, rather

hopeful blasphemy; 'if it were a visible hand. Why not?'

Then she collapsed. She burst into a torrent of tears like a child. I soothed and comforted her gently, and by very slow degrees arrived at the following narrative:

'When my husband went to London last Tuesday week I was the happiest woman in England. It came first that night. I woke in the pitch-dark and found the room rapidly growing light. Distinct beams of light appeared to shine from wall to wall, and at last formed a dim circle. Then marks—horrid creeping marks—appeared on the bright circle, and these gradually shaped themselves into the fingers of a moving hand. It was like a human hand cut off at the wrist, and it began—O God! I swear to you it began to write slowly on the wall. The letters grew into words, and the words grew into a sentence. At last I read in a strangely formed caligraphy the awful warning:

PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD.

I was terrified to death and unable to move; and as I watched, spell-bound, the fearful letters faded away, and the room was left in utter darkness again.

I lay the rest of the night reflecting upon this apparition, and wondering whether it was meant for me, or for Tom, or for both of us. When daylight returned my nerves felt rather more steady, for the room was exactly as usual, and showed no sign of the ghostly writing. I almost expected to find it indelibly recorded upon the wall. I thought perhaps the whole thing had been a nightmare, and determined to say not a word about it, but to sleep alone in the room again and see if it were repeated.

'That was the day you sent me to bed early; and, being worn out as the result of the previous night's experience, I soon fell into a fitful doze. On one of my awakenings I found that the room was getting light just as before. The circle reappeared, the marks in it, the great black hand, the gradually formed letters; but the warning was different. It said:

GOD SHALL JUDGE.

I sprang out of bed and rushed to the writing. I put my hand on its horrible sable signs, and it vanished instantaneously. It was no dream.

'You can imagine the condition in which I awaited the break of day. I did not call my husband, for I had an indefinable sense that some danger, in which he was concerned, was impending in this room, and that a warning had been vouchsafed to me that he would be unable to perceive with his different and rather unbelieving constitution.

'That morning he insisted upon my going with him to Great Malvern; and while we were away from this fearful house I felt a sense of freedom,

and regained a measure of composure. I began almost to think again, as the days went by, that the whole thing must have been a passing madness, and determined, on my return, to spend yet one more night in the room alone before asking him to come back to me.

'But last night was more horrible than all. I awoke with a great start in black darkness. There came a burst of white light, which disappeared as suddenly as it had come, and left a darkness that could be felt. Then another burst, and then darkness again. Then the dim circle began to appear in the same hideous outline, and as it got brighter the hand traced slowly the cruel doom :

YOUR HOUR IS NIGH.

I fainted away, and recollect nothing more until daylight this morning.'

As she spoke it occurred to me that the whole appearance must be nothing more than a vivid hallucination—possibly the harbinger of insanity. If so, it had had an extraordinary physical effect, allowing for the girl's delicately strung nerves and artistic temperament. Still, the effort must be made to fathom the mystery.

'Answer me one more question truly,' I urged. 'Do you know any one who has a grudge against you?'

'Doctor,' she replied, with a troubled look in her innocent eyes, 'so far as I know, I never injured a living creature. I never disagreed with any one much, except an Italian in my stage days, who would persist in wanting to marry me after I was pledged to Tom.'

'His name?'

'Count Belloni, a vile creature; but I have not seen or heard anything of him for a year.'

That night Tom Whyte and I entered into a little conspiracy. I asked him and his wife across to dinner, nominally to stop Margaret brooding, and having got them away from home, insisted on keeping them for the night. Tom pretended to refuse and then to assent; and I hinted to Margaret that, if he were in any danger, it was at least lessened while he was with me, and so gained her acceptance of the invitation. When they had retired I went across with Tom's latch-key, let myself into his house unknown, even to his servants, and prepared to spend the night sitting in his bedroom.

As I waited, thinking deeply about the mystery, I became more than ever convinced that a hallucination was the true key to the trouble. There is said to be a kink somewhere in the mental constitution of every one of us; and surely, I thought, there must be some such explanation, which would put these weird visitations into the category of imaginings. My meditations on the pathology of the matter were rudely interrupted. The room was filled with an instantaneous flash of white light, which came and went in a second, leaving every-

thing totally dark. I started up and waited breathless. The flash appeared and vanished a second time, as before. My brain seemed stirred to abnormal activity. I felt, rather than thought positively, that here was evidence which destroyed the hallucination theory, for I was in prosaic health. I even reasoned unintentionally that here was a flash whose first appearance would discompose a sleeper, and whose second, when he had been disturbed, would complete his awakening.

Then began the most appalling moment of concentrated horror that has fallen to my lot. I am held professionally to have a good operating nerve; but to think of that brief interval even now sends a chill down my back. At the time my eyes seemed to start from my head, and my hands were lifted up in terror. Slowly, but steadily, the white circle grew on the wall. There was a dark mark in the centre, which gradually formed itself into the awful hand whose writing pronounced doom. Instantly the word-painting of the Book of Daniel rushed into my mind :

'In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace : and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another.'

And even while these thoughts coursed through my burning brain the hand began to write. It traced one fearful word, and only one :

TEKEL.

Daniel himself has translated that portentous symbol: 'Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.'

The vision disappeared from my unwilling gaze, and I was again sitting in the darkness. How long I remained comatose I cannot say. Ultimately I lighted the gas, and found that it was twenty minutes past three. The power of thought seemed to return to me slowly; but after a time I recovered my mental faculties, and began to try and unravel the tangle. The hallucination theory being obviously impossible, I began to look for a physical explanation. I was still at it in a dull kind of way when the dawn of another day broke, and then I began to think that I could see a light in a double sense.

I placed a table under where the hand had appeared, and stood upon it. Putting my eye about on a level with the writing, I looked out of the window. The direction was not at right angles to the wall of the bedroom, but inclined to the left and downwards, thus ending with a view of a brick wall, instead of looking squarely into the garden. This wall was the back of a modern stable, and quite blank, the creepers

planted at the base not having grown up it. It was unsightly, but it suggested a further idea. No one was astir yet, and I let myself out noiselessly, and made my way to the stable. By placing the loft-ladder against the wall and climbing up backwards I managed to reach about the spot where my glance from the bedroom had been fixed. Of course, to look at the bedroom window now it was necessary to turn to the right and upwards. It is an elementary law of optics that the angle of reflected light from a plane surface is equal to the angle of incidence. I roughly estimated with my eye an equal angle again to the left and downwards. The glance ended at the back window of the first cottage in North Lane. A mirror, then, hung where I stood would reveal in the bedroom what was going on in the cottage, or *vice versa*; and the distance was not great.

I slipped back into the Whytes' house. It was half-past six, and everything was still quite quiet. I went out by the front entrance, made my way round to the cottage in North Lane, and rapped loudly at the cottage door, intending to get a peep inside before the usual hour for callers. After a protracted interval I was answered by a surly-looking man, half-dressed.

'Is this Mr Smith's?' I asked. No better question came into my head for the moment, and I had foolishly gone without one ready prepared.

'No,' said the man shortly. 'Tompkins. What do you want at this time of day?'

The table in the room had nothing on it; but at that moment, peeping round the man, my eye lighted upon a piece of wire on the floor, curled and silk-bound. It told its own tale.

'Tompkins the electrician?' I hazarded, looking at the wire.

'Lectrician? No,' said the man sulkily, but with ill-concealed surprise. 'What do you want?'

'I want to see Count Belloni or his representative,' I said, stepping past the man into the room.

He started, and turned round fiercely.

'What do you mean?' he cried. At the same moment I caught sight of a roll of the film used in instantaneous photography for a series of pictures, packed away on a shelf.

'The game is up,' I said. 'You are found out. That is all.'

The man's hand went into his pocket; but I anticipated him as he drew it forth, and landed him fairly between the eyes with all my strength. As he staggered backwards the weapon he was raising flew from his hand, and I picked it up. It was a Colt, loaded.

'Now,' I said, covering him, 'the positions are changed. You have tried to murder me. No tricks, or I shoot. Now, set your vision-plant at work, or I will give you in charge. And look sharp.'

He had to comply, but it was with a good deal of profanity. As I had expected since my visit to the cottage, the idea was worked out with an electric light, a cinematograph of beautiful construction, and a large mirror, hung on the stable wall. With the aid of the Colt I soon had the whole story out. My prisoner was the jealous Count's tool, and was trying to frighten Margaret into her grave.

The habits of the household had been so carefully watched that it was known when the Whytes left for Malvern, and when they returned. The trick was rendered possible from the fact that Whyte's old house, like all of its kind in the Midlands, had unshuttered upstair windows, whilst it had also white blinds on rollers to relieve the gloom of the oak panels within. The rascals had discovered a trick of Maggie's of reposing with her blind up; but I found they had actually provided themselves with plant to perform on the white blind as a screen if she should forget her usual practice. The cat's-paw was allowed to escape on easy terms; but I do not think Margaret will be troubled any more with the Italian. He has gone abroad indefinitely.

NOCTIS D E A.

FAR in the west the glowing colours fade

While sober Evening darkens all the sky;
And Night, with lagging steps too long delayed,
Unfolds her mantle as she passes by.

Like to a maiden, smiling through her tears,

The silvery moon looks through a wandering cloud
As fair and bright as in far-distant years
When Greek and Roman in her temples bowed.

Once, long ago, on Egypt's ancient lands,

That moon shone down with soft, mysterious light,
When the new pyramids, upon the sands,
Rose dark and sombre in the lonely night;

Or where the dusky daughters of the Nile

Amid their lotus-blossoms sank to rest,
In sweet forgetfulness beneath thy smile,
Pale Queen of Night, in queenly radiance drest.

The lotus-blossoms have long since decayed,

The towering pyramids are wrapt in gloom,
The Pharaohs' mouldering dust long time has laid
Within the dreary portals of the tomb.

But thou, resplendent, dost ascend the sky

And flood the world with streaming silver lights
While the swift ages pass unheeded by;
Serene thou reignest, sovereign Queen of Night.

ALFRED EGERTON.